ASSESSMENT OF TOURISTS SATISFACTION AND PERCEPTION IN MAKURDI ZOOLOGICAL GARDEN, BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The assessment of tourists' satisfaction and perception in Makurdi Zoological garden, Nigeria was elucidated using two sets of structured questionnaires; in-depth interview and desk review. This paper explores the underlying reasons accounting for tourists' tendency to repeat their visit and preferences in the garden, the category of people who patronized the zoo most and sourcing visitors' views on what can be done to make the garden more viable. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and line graph) and the Pearson chi-square test of independent were used in data analysis. Results analyzed revealed that student groups (70%) in primary, secondary and tertiary cycle patronized the garden most. The purpose of visitation among tourists was for education (35%) and viewing of animals (33%). The most preferred wildlife species visitors came to view were lion, elephants, chimpanzee, monkeys, crocodile, and birds respectively. Tourists express dissatisfaction over diversity/welfare of fauna species in the zoo, route network, security/ protection against hazards and the abandoned areas like the picnic, museum and restaurants. They also perceived that good management, proper advertisement, good landscape (horticulture), restocking and rehabilitation of depilated or abandoned facilities will promote patronage, create satisfaction and equally step up the revenue of the garden. Age and gender has no significant effect on visitation to the zoo ($\alpha_{0.05}$) while marital status and occupation was observed to have ($\alpha_{0.05}$). The recommendation is made that government should increase its financial commitment, improve on its management strategies and renovate dilapidated and abandoned structures to make the garden attractive and viable.

Keywords: Tourist, Satisfaction, Perception, Makurdi Zoological garden

INTRODUCTION

The idea behind conservation of natural resources such as lakes, rivers, waterfalls, hot springs and geysers, wildlife, forests, minerals (gold, manganese, bauxite, diamond, iron ore etc.) including mountains/hills is based on the economic value placed on them. Hence ecotourism is the use of such natural areas for tourism and recreational purpose (Kuuder, *et al.*, 2013). These areas include National parks, Game reserves, Zoological gardens, sanctuaries, museum lagoons, wetlands and Forest reserves.

Many National parks and Zoological gardens allow tourists an opportunity to enjoy and appreciate majestic parks rich in wildlife (Kuuder, *et al.*, 2013), sensitize

tourists to the value and need for conservation of wildlife (Uloko, 2004; Borokini, 2013), increases their interest, motivation, experience and appreciation of nature (Corazon, 2008). Furthermore, this solidifies the relationship of co-existence between wild animals and man to satisfy its quest for natural phenomena (Ayodele and Alarape, 1998). So, zoological gardens are typical examples of Ex-situ conservation and represent an opportunity for family-based trips (Chris and Jan, 2004).

Makurdi zoological garden is one of the largest gardens situated in the Eastern part of Makurdi town sand-witched within Benue State, Nigeria. Gazetted in 1976, this garden presents a very beautify scenery and has riparian vegetation along the bank of the river. Common faunal base species that are caged include Ostrich *(Struthio camelus)*, Peacocks (*Pavo cristatus),* White geese *(Chen caerulescens),* Crown crane *(Balaerica pavonina),* Porcupine *(Antherurus africanus),* Maxwell's duiker *(Philantoba maxwellii),* Lion *(Panthra leo),* Strip hyena *(Hyena hyena),* Mona monkey (*Cercopithecus mona*), Tantalus monkey *(Cercopithecus tantalus),* Patas monkey *(Erythrocebus patas),* Chimpanzee *(Pan troglodytes),* Nile crocodile *(Crocodylus*

niloticus), Short nose Crocodile *(Crocodylus osteolaenus),* and Giant tortoise *(Kinxys erosa),* including unique floristic species. These species therefore offer guests the necessary recreation and amusement when visiting this garden. Zoological gardens in Nigeria have the potentials of tourist attraction especially in wildlife-based tourism but their level of development, patronage and baseline data combined with insufficient funding make its growth stunted (Uloko and Iwar, 2011; Omonona and Kayode, 2011).

Ecotourism is credited with promoting the conservation of natural resources provides local economic benefits (employment opportunities) while also maintaining ecological integrity through low-impact, non-consumptive use of local resources (Amogne, 2014). Nature tourism is a growing segment of the tourism market with countries of Africa and beyond reaping enormously from the sub- sector. Measuring satisfaction in tourism has two purposes: providing information about customer needs and how prepared the organization is currently at meeting these needs and in turn provide a platform for organizations to communicate with their customers then source their likes and dislikes (Kuuder *et al*., 2013). Kuuder *et al*., (2013) noted that little attention has

been given to tourist satisfaction in nature-based setting in Africa. Accordingly, an attempt at finding out tourist/visitor satisfaction and perception in this garden is worth the while. In a related approach Covelli *et al*., (2005) pointed out that concepts of quality as perceived by tourists including levels of satisfaction and perception have rarely been applied in nature research. However, Fyall *et al.,* (2001) pointed out that recreational participation is based on visitor attractions which can be classified according to whether they are built specifically or are natural as stated by Dewhurst, (1996) show in table 1.

Table 1: Some categories of tourist attractions for recreational purpose

Attraction Category	Attraction type	Constituent attraction
Historico-cultural	Religious site	Abbey cathedrals, chapels, priories
	Museums and galleries	Art galleries, open air museums
	Historic sites	Castles, landmarks, monuments, palaces
	Interpretive heritage sites	Interpretive centres, heritage sites
	Multi-faceted historic sites	Castles, docklands, historic houses, palace
Environmental	Animal attractions	Safari parks, wildlife parks, zoos, rare breed farms, nature centres, aquaria
	Parks and gardens	Botanic gardens, outdoor activity parks, public parks
	Country parks	Country parks, reservoir
Entertainment	Leisure and recreation complexes	Leisure centres, leisure pools, recreation centres, water parks
	Amusement parks	Pleasure beaches, pleasure parks
	Theme parks	Indoor parks, outdoor parks, beach resorts
	Themed retail outlets	Antique centres, garden centres, retail and leisure parks
	Workplace industrial visit centres	Craft workshops, factory shops
Miscellaneous		Arboretums, piers, themed transport

Source: Dewhurst, (1996) as cited in Kuuder *et al*., (2013)

The study sought to assess the level of satisfaction derived and perception among visitors who patronized the garden whilst seeking specifically to:

- Determine Nationality and occupation of tourists who visited the garden
- Find out visitor-motivation and perception of the garden

- Ascertain if their expectations are met and
- Solicit views on what can be done to make the garden more viable/recreation worthy

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

The Makurdi zoological garden (now named Riverville Resort) is situated in the Eastern part of Makurdi town sand-witched within Benue State. It is located within the Guinea Savannah zone between latitude 7ºE and 75ºN and longitude 80ºE and 80ºN; it is on the Southern bank of river Benue and about 1.5km along Makurdi-Gboko express way. It is also half a kilometre off Makurdi-Gboko express road and covers about 25 hectares of land.

The study started with a preliminary survey of the area. A three (3) months period spanning (July- September, 2014) was the period of data collection from 200 tourists who visited the garden and 11 members of staff of the garden with the use of structured questionnaire. The respondents included civil servants, students, business men, and researchers among others. Records for monthly data of tourists were obtained through secondary data. Oral interview were employed to source additional information from the staff of the zoo and some selected tourists. On measurement of levels of tourist's satisfaction in the garden, a five point Liker scale of response was availed as follows; extremely satisfied, very satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, line graph and tables) was used for demographic statistic of the respondents and the Pearson Chi-square to test relationship between visitation to Zoological garden and age; gender; marital status and occupation at $\alpha_{0.05}$.

RESULT

Table 2 shows that, 197 visitors representing 98.5% were Nigerian and the remaining (3) which constituted 1.5% were non-Nigerian (Foreigners). Most (59.5%) of the respondents are males while 40.5% are female, and majority (45.5%) of the tourists fall within the age bracket of 15 – 30 years. The result further shows that majority (70%) were students who visited the garden during the three months period of the study; this was followed by retirees (10%) and teacher's 7.0%. others constituted drivers (5.5%) and researchers 1%.

From table 3, 35%; 33% and 21.0% of the respondents came to learn, see animals/birding and pleasure respectively.

Most of the respondents knew of the zoo through friends/relatives (35.5%); teachers (26.5%) and electronic media (16%). On how the visit was sponsored to the garden 47.5% indicated that they came on group tour (school management); 26.5% arrived individually whilst 0.5% was sponsored by a teacher. Most (45%) of the respondents indicated that the peak of their enjoyment was seeing animals/birding. However, about 61% indicate lack of interest to repeat their visit against 18% of the tourist, while 21% were neutral. The respondent's frequency of animal of interest is presented in figure 1. The most preferred animal species were as follows; Lion (47.5%), Chimpanzee (18%), Monkeys (16%), Crocodile (9%), Ostrich (4%), Hyena (2.5%), Tortoise (2%) and Duiker (1%).

Table 2: Demographic Statistics of Visitors in Makurd Zoological Garden

	Variables	**Number of tourists**	**Percentage**
Nationality	Nigerian	197	98.5
	Non-Nigerian	3	1.5
	Total	200	
Gender	Male	119	59.5
	Female	81	40.5
	Total	200	
Age (years)	≤ 15	70	35.0
	15-30	91	45.5
	31-40	32	16.0
	≥ 45	7	3.5
Occupation	Students	140	70.0
	Teachers	14	7.0
	Researchers	10	5.0
	Retirees	20	10.0
	Drivers	11	5.5
	Others	5	2.5
	Total	200	

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

Table 3: Experience/Purpose of Visit by Tourists

|	Variables	Number of tourist	Percentage
Purpose of visit	Know about nature	18	9.0
	Educational	70	35.0
	Seeing animals/Birding	66	33.0
	Pleasure/leisure	42	21.0
	Others	4	2.0
	Total	200	
Information search	Friends/relatives	71	35.5
	Media (Electronics/paper)	32	16.0
	Signpost	30	15.0
	Teachers	53	26.5
	Others	14	7.0
	Total	200	
Who sponsored your visit	Personal	53	26.5
	School management	95	47.5
	Teacher	1	0.5
	Parents	41	20.5
	Others	10	5.0
	Total	200	
Peak of enjoyment	Natural environment	37	18.5
	Lectures	22	11.0
	Seeing animals/birding	90	45.0
	Children playing ground	44	22.0
	Others	7	3.5
	Total	200	
Tendency to revisit	Yes	36	18.0
	No	122	61.0
	Neutral	42	21.0
	Total	200	

Source: Field work, 2014
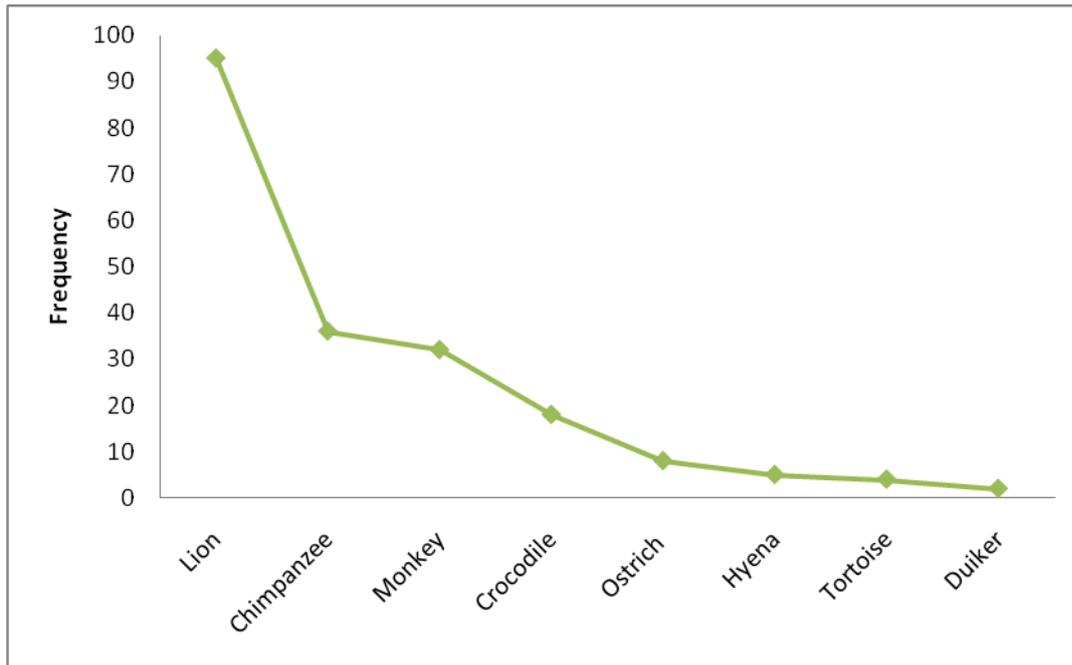
Figure 1: Common Faunal Species of Choice by the Tourist

   Source: Fieldwork, 2014.

Table 4: Monthly Data of Tourists (Adult and Children) Recorded at Makurdi Zoological

   Garden between (2009 – 2013)

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
2009	295	340	230	2145	450	564	434	847	756	952	612	2865	10490
2010	230	248	589	2014	562	458	168	789	895	1000	569	1985	9507
2011	485	234	354	1423	630	600	358	682	481	895	698	1648	8488
2012	500	235	140	1268	145	600	321	634	589	623	314	1256	6625
2013	345	112	100	1423	105	421	175	354	511	564	402	1147	5659

Source: Makurdi Zoological Garden and Manatarium (2013)

Tourists' Opinion on Level of Satisfaction Derived

Response from tourist indicates that 61% and 43.5% of visitors were extremely satisfied with the entry fee and the guide service respectively. However 72.5% of the tourist who visited the zoo were very dissatisfied with the diversity/welfare of the fauna species, route network (47.5%) communication facilities (45.5%), security and protection against hazards (42%), while a few were neutral (12%). About 3% further registered dissatisfaction because they didn't see most of the five star

Issues of Concern Raised by the Tourists

animals like Elephant (*Loxodonta africana)* and Gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla*)

Perception Level of Tourists

Feedback from the tourist, reveal that, they have a positive perception as regards the development and performance of the zoo. They strongly agreed that the zoo could promote patronage if properly advertised (56%), if well managed (74%), provide adequate diversity/welfare of fauna species (46.5%), and create proper landscape (65%) of the zoo and other variables that can promote the standard.

Table 5: Issues of concern

Concerns	Number of Tourists	Percentage
Scarce fauna species and poor cage enrichment	87	43.5
Abandoned picnic (beach)	51	25.5
Poor toilets	17	8.5
Inadequate infrastructures	14	7
Abandoned museum	12	6
Abandoned canteen	11	5.5
Dilapidate fence	8	4.0
Total	**200**	

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

Majority of the visitors (43.5%) complained of the inadequate diversity of fauna species/ poor cage enrichment. Others also identified poor state of the zoo picnic site (25.5%), poor toilets (8.5%), inadequate infrastructures (7%),

abandoned museum (6%), abandoned canteen (5.5%) and dilapidated fence (4%) as issues of concern that needed serious tackling at the management level. Furthermore, many identified some facilities/ services such as wildlife clinic,

telecommunication, nursery (zoo farm) and visitors guide booklet being absent and are needed.

DISCUSSION

Recreational facilities in the zoos serve as visitor attractions which motivate guests to want to move to the site. A visitor/tourist attraction is a vital component of any country's tourism industry, as they stimulate travel to destinations. In this direction, one of the priorities of the Makurdi Zoological garden should be to make the garden viable.

Majority 197 (98.5%) of the tourists where Nigerians; Records from the zoo administration have also proven that over the years, domestic arrivals are greater than international ones. Age blacket between 15-30 years (45.5%) of the tourist patronizes the zoo most. A total number of 10,490; 9,507; 8,488; 6,625; and 5,659 of both children and adult visited the zoo in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2013 respectively; this shows that, there was a decline in the number of tourist from 2009 to 2013.

On information search about the zoo, 35.5% of the tourists got to hear/knew about the zoo from friends/relatives**.** By implication, the most potent tool in "wooing" more tourists to the garden is through word of mouth, this agrees with Kuuder *et al*., (2013). Students and

teachers who where the chief patrons of the zoo often preferred group tours because it created room for education, socialization and an opportunity to admire nature collectively.

Purpose of visit

The educational motive was found to be high (35%), this agree with the findings of Uloko and Iwar, 2011; Hunter-Jones and Hayward, 1998; Turley, 2001; Adams and Salome, 2014. Also in emphasising student/teacher and family togetherness, enjoyment and novelty seeking, with the added nuance that design perceived to be animal friendly adds to the enjoyment of the visit. Other features visitors listed which were of interest to them within and alongside the zoo vicinity were caves, river Benue, seasonal island and canoeing/fishing activities.

Visitor opinion on level of satisfaction

Responses from the tourist indicate that 61% of them were extremely satisfied with the entry fee and guide services. However, 72.5% of the tourists were very dissatisfied with the diversity/ welfare of the caged animals and other basic facilities like electricity, route network and prevention against hazards whereas 3% further registered dissatisfaction because they didn't see most of the five star animals like Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and Gorilla

(*Gorilla gorilla*). This, the tourist perceive and strongly agreed that, the zoo will attract and promote patronage if well advertised and managed.

Those visitors who made return trips assigned reasons that there aren't many activities of interest to be engaged in after viewing few animals that were caged, a such 61% indicated lost of interest to repeat their visit. This is a confirmation that satisfaction is a vital element in the survival of any tourism attraction. All visitors were day trippers as they never spend the night in the garden, hence the zoo administration has a great task of making the facility more appealing to attract repeat visitors and enticing all visitors to spend qualitative time to maximised their visit.

Issue of concern

A few tourists interviewed mentioned that when they return on repeat visits, it would be impressive to see an improvement in the abandoned, dilapidate, poor and facilities that were absent.

To the respondents, these areas of concern needed urgent attention/improvement by management. Every visitor was asked to identify the most pressing according to his/ her priority.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the satisfaction and perception of tourists to Makurdi Zoological garden and identified students group as the chief patrons of the zoo ranging from 15-30 years. The purpose of visit by many tourists (35%) was to learn whilst the most preferred animal species was the lion (*Pantera leo*).

The Makurdi Zoological garden still remains a good tourist destination and its responsibility as a center of excellence in tourism is not being met to the fullest of its potentials. The garden has all it takes to become a World Standard Zoological Reserves; this is because it can support all the ecological resources in terms of both flora and fauna. However, it is only pertinent to mention that the problems of the garden have been linked to some inadequacies, both in planning, development and management process. Majority of the tourist express concern about the poor state of the picnic, toilets, museum, and inadequate fauna species, creating lack of interest to repeat their visit. A good number of tourists have shown positive perception and indicates that good management is the potent tool to visitor satisfaction. An implication for policy formulation is that if government needs to develop tourism infrastructure to Makurdi Zoological Gardens and other reserves, diversity of fauna species and

other basic amenities must be made a priority.

A sizeable number of the tourist called for the rehabilitation of the zoo, so it is

prudent for adequate funding, skilled personnel and powerful publicity in order to boost domestic tourism receipts to the garden.

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